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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ENVOY PLANS GREATER ENGAGEMENT, PROPOSES
DARFUR ROUNDTABLE IN MOSCOW

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: President Bashir promised that the GOS will carry on with "business as usual" and asserted there would be no government-orchestrated hostile response to the issuance of an ICC arrest warrant, Russian Special Envoy Mikhail Margelov told CDA Fernandez in a meeting on January 30. Margelov also explained to CDA his proposal to leverage Russia's goodwill in Sudan to play a greater role in the country's political affairs, beginning with plans to host a roundtable discussion on Darfur in Moscow in the coming months. President Bashir gave his blessing to the idea, which would bring together political and intellectual elites for a wide-ranging discussion on how to solve the crisis. The roundtable would be intended to complement, not supplant, other ongoing initiatives such as the Doha talks, he said. Margelov also recounted his trip to Juba for meetings with GOSS officials, questioned whether Southern independence was a fait accompli, and advocated remaking Sudan into a loose federation or confederation to avoid the creation of additional failed states. Margelov stated that he witnessed tremendous improvement in El Fasher town and the surrounding areas since his last visit in 2006, but had also asked President Bashir to take decisive action to solve the crisis. He also pledged continued Russian support for UNAMID and UNMIS. End Summary.

¶12. (U) On January 30, CDA met with Russian Special Envoy Mikhail Margelov in Khartoum. (Note: Margelov, who is also the Chairman of the Russian Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, was appointed to the position in December 2008 by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. End Note.) It was the last day of Margelov's week-long trip to Sudan, during which time he visited Khartoum, El Fasher and Juba.

BASHIR OFFERS ASSURANCES OF BUSINESS AS USUAL

¶13. (C) Margelov briefed CDA on his meeting with President Bashir, whom he characterized as extremely jovial and relaxed. He stated that with regard to the ICC, Bashir told him he has not given up hope for a delay in the issuance of an arrest warrant against him. But if and when a warrant is issued, Bashir said he hopes that the UN Security Council members won't rule out an Article 16 Deferral. When Margelov asked Bashir about the potential fallout from ICC, Bashir asserted that the GOS will carry on with business as usual. There would be no expulsion of foreign diplomats, incitement of violent demonstrations or any other such backlash, said Bashir, who joked that "I'm no Lukashenko" (referring to the autocratic Belorussian President). Margelov stated that he welcomed this news, and encouraged Bashir to take decisive action to solve the crisis in Darfur. "I told him, 'You have to be accountable and you have to deliver,'" he said. "You

can't be just be defensive and react to what you hear from the international community."

14. (C) Margelov also traveled to Juba, where he met with GOSS President Salva Kiir. "It's quite clear to us that it would be a big mistake to develop contacts only in Khartoum," explained Margelov. He stated that Kiir is particularly concerned with the fallout from the ICC and is afraid it will further aggravate tensions in Darfur and endanger the CPA. Margelov also observed that the South appears more cautious regarding independence than a year ago, and was curious as to whether the USG views Southern independence as a fait accompli. CDA stated that it was not, but the USG full supports the South's right to do so per the CPA and acknowledged the challenge of reversing the momentum of the drive toward independence. Margelov also noted that the SPLM is very eager to increase ties with Russia, and various officials in Juba asked him to facilitate contacts with their counterparts in Moscow. Many Southerners have a strong affinity for Russia from memories of time spent in the USSR and other former Communist countries, he said. The same could be said of the North as well, continued Margelov, noting that he was approached by numerous Russian-speaking Sudanese while shopping at the famous Omdurman souk.

PLANS FOR A DARFUR ROUNDTABLE IN MOSCOW

15. (C) Given that Russia constitutes a "friendly atmosphere" for both Northerners and Southerners, Margelov told CDA he had proposed convening a gathering of Sudanese political leaders, current and retired diplomats, scientists and other

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intellectuals from all over Sudan to Moscow for a forum to discuss the conflict in Darfur in 2009. "The media reported that it would be a 'conference', but I envision it as more of a 'roundtable,'" he said. Margelov clarified that such an initiative was intended to build on Russian goodwill in Sudan to complement current efforts, not to be a substitute for them. "We're not trying to replace Qatar," he noted. President Bashir has pledged his support to the Russian initiative, he said.

16. (C) Margelov stated that he has come to believe that a loose federation or confederation of autonomous states is the optimal outcome for the political future of Sudan. "Both South Sudan and Darfur will become failed states in the days of economic crises," he said. "And of course, the worst case scenario for a 2011 separation is a return to war." He also noted that there was no chance for "regime change from outside" - a change in leadership would have to come from within. CDA remarked that the federal system described by Margelov had in fact been rejected at negotiations in Naivasha, and many institutions built in the South (primarily the SPLA) would be difficult to integrate into a federal arrangement. Furthermore, no work has yet been done to lay the ground for such a vision, he said.

17. (C) With regard to Darfur, Margelov also told CDA that on his visit to El Fasher, he observed "great improvement" in the town and surrounding areas since his last visit in 2006. He also noted that nearby IDP camps look more like ordinary Darfuri villages rather than camps. "As I see it, there is no big difference between these camps and the other settlements surrounding El Fasher," he said. CDA stated that while the living conditions in some camps may be improving, the camps' inhabitants are still deeply aggrieved and angry from being displaced from their original homes. "The problem is psychological and political, not just in the material well-being of the people." Margelov also reiterated Russia's desire to make use of its goodwill with Sudan in cooperation with other members of the UN Security Council, and pledged continued support for UNAMID and UNMIS in areas such as helicopters.

¶8. (C) Comment: After years of neglect, the sincerity of Russia's desire to playing an active role in Sudan remains to be seen. Though Margelov appears well-intentioned, his musings on a potential confederation appear not very well thought-out and are moot given the reality of the CPA. With regard to Darfur, it's difficult to see how the proposed roundtable would complement existing initiatives, or how it would differ from the Sudan People's Initiative, the latter of which has yielded zero concrete results (though it did advance the national discussion of what a "solution" for Darfur might look like). Nonetheless, Russia's willingness to engage on Sudan ought not to be ignored, as the goodwill it enjoys with both the GNU and the GOSS can be leveraged in conjunction with other UNSC permanent members, both in Darfur and in post-2011 North-South relations.

FERNANDEZ